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On the front line for Sakharov

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For Andrei Sakharov, isolated in the lonely Soviet city of Gorki, the cold month of February is just another month to be endured in exile. But while the famous Russian physicist is cut off from communicating with the world, others continue to promote his ideas.

Mr. Sakharov does not know that an institute named in his honor, the Andrei Sakharov Institute (ASI), is moving into its first real offices in Washington this month. Nor does he know that a school for American students, teaching mathematics and science, will open in the nation's capital next week bearing his name. Years ago, according to one of Mr. Sakharov's cohorts, Mr. Sakharov founded a similar school in Moscow for Russian youth.

Edward Lozansky, a fellow Russian and longtime admirer of Mr. Sakharov, is the founder of ASI. The institute recently was adopted by Long Island University in Brooklyn, N.Y., which grants credit to students who complete courses here. The institute will operate as a Washington, D.C.-based campus of the university.

Like Mr. Sakharov, Mr. Lozansky sees the East-West struggle in terms that go far beyond the arms race. He is concerned about ideology, about values, and about basic education.

Mr. Lozansky's personal life has long been linked to that of the exiled scientist. A professor of mathematics and physics, he lost his job at the military academy in Moscow nine years ago for defending Andrei Sakharov in front of his students. One of them reported him to the Russian secret intelligence agency, the KGB. He was out of a job and soon out of the country, leaving his wife and daughter behind.

"I was not really an active dissident, but I never kept my mouth shut," he says of his life in Moscow. "Whenever I felt I should say something, I did say it."

Brazen activism

That outspokenness blossomed into brazen activism once he came to the Western world. He campaigned for six years to get permission for his wife and daughter to emigrate. After Mr. Sakharov's arrest in 1980, he took up that cause with equal fervor.

Mr. Lozansky founded the institute in obscurity in Rochester, N.Y., in 1980 while teaching at the University of Rochester. It was his response to an appeal from Mr. Sakharov's wife, Yelena Bonner, immediately after her husband's arrest in January 1980.

"Our only protection is the spotlight of public attention to our fate by friends around the world," Mrs. Bonner had written in a letter addressed to scientists around the world.

The institute now has a board of directors comprised of a number of academic leaders and scientists, some Nobel Prize-winners. But for most of its first five years, Mr. Lozansky *was* the Andrei Sakharov Institute.

His primary concern was the liberation of Mr. Sakharov; it is still the main goal of the institute. Scientific conferences in honor of the Russian scientist, demonstrations at the Soviet Embassy, and a constant barrage of letters and petitions to the Soviet authorities have kept his case in public view and reminded the Soviets that the prominent scientist has not been forgotten.

Embarrassing the Soviets

Mr. Lozansky was thinking constantly of ways to embarrass the Soviet authorities into responding to his demands. He and several professor friends held a few demonstrations and conferences in Rochester. Then Mr. Lozansky saw his first opportunity to do something big.

It was December 1980. An international meeting to verify compliance with the 1975 Helsinki agreements was being held in Madrid. Mr. Lozansky decided to go, and to stage his own show for the delegates to remind them that the Soviet Union was still depriving dissidents of their rights, against the spirit of the accords. He sold his house in Rochester in order to rent the biggest hall in Madrid, pay for the transportation and expenses of a group of famous former Soviet musicians, and print up and give away some 3,000 tickets in order to fill the hall.

"The idea was to have an evening to honor human rights activists in the Soviet Union on the eve of the opening of this Madrid conference on security and cooperation in Europe," Mr. Lozansky says. "We invited all delegations to come, and many delegations accepted. For the Soviets it was a tremendous embarrassment. They came to the city for the conference, even [Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko came, and just the same evening all Madrid was honoring Soviet dissidents."

Mr. Lozansky figures he lost about $25,000 on the Madrid program, but he says it was worth it. "It was a financial disaster, but it was a tremendous political success," he says, with satisfaction at the memory.

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Deciding that he must devote himself full time to the cause he had undertaken, Mr. Lozansky packed up his remaining belongings in his car and drove to Washington, D.C. — the place in which he figured he would be most visible to Soviet authorities. He lived for six months in the basement of an organization on Capitol Hill, courtesy of a friend who ran it. While living practically as a beggar, he borrowed money to rent the Kennedy Center for his next big bash — a 60th birthday party for Andrei Sakharov on May 21, 1981. This event not only attracted high-level sponsorship, but actually earned a little money for the still-infant institute.

Deciding he could not continue to live in the basement, Mr. Lozansky turned to teaching at George Mason and American Universities. Then an offer from Long Island University came along which has allowed him to combine his teaching with the work of the Andrei Sakharov Institute. He now will teach math courses at the new institute.

Sacrificing career for family

His confidence that there is hope for Andrei Sakharov's release comes from Mr. Lozansky's successful efforts to bring his wife and daughter to the United States. The daughter of a four-star general in the Soviet military hierarchy, Tatiana Lozansky had been forced to stay behind and then to sign divorce papers when her husband was exiled. Mr. Lozansky drew the West's attention to her cause.

He got a group of Nobel laureates to make statements on her behalf while attending the awards ceremony in Stockholm. In 1982 he organized a ceremony to remarry his wife under American law. The highly publicized ceremony-by-proxy was held in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, with Rep. Jack Kemp, R-N.Y., as best man, Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan., as witness, and other prominent guests attending.

The final strategy was a hunger strike undertaken by Mrs. Lozansky in May 1982, along with six spouses of foreigners who had been forbidden to leave the country. After she had fasted 53 days and was near death, her father, Gen. Ivan Yershov, visited her in her Moscow apartment.

"He couldn't take it anymore," Mr. Lozansky says. "Something human developed in his communist heart, and he said he would get her permission to go. It wasn't easy for him. He went to the highest authorities, I believe to [Leonid I.] Brezhnev himself, but they said it was impossible. Then he said he would resign to clear the way for emigration."

Mrs. Lozansky's father resigned his post, forfeiting his special privileges and a successful career, to live as a retired military man in Moscow. And Mrs. Lozansky boarded a plane with her daughter for the United States.

It was the first time such a thing has happened in the upper levels of the communist society, Mr. Lozansky says. "He did something which no communist official could do, because for communist officials the family is secondary," Mr. Lozansky explains. "Most important is his loyalty to the party. All of us were educated that first is the party and second is family, friends, etc. When you have to make a choice, you always choose the party, not the family. We were raised on examples of how a boy reported to the KGB about his father and the father was shot because he was an enemy of the communists."

Mrs. Lozansky now teaches Russian in a private Washington institute. Their daughter, Tanya, is now 14, and attends a private school.

With this victory under his belt, Mr. Lozansky turned his full attention to the cause of Mr. Sakharov, a cause which he sincerely believes can bring results, though the Soviet response to all his efforts is minimal. Two spokesmen at the Soviet Embassy here denied any knowledge of the institute's existence.

"I think if you want something very strong and you are ready to fight for this, you will achieve it," Mr. Lozansky says. "The Soviets once in a while release pictures to show the pressure is working, they are sensitive. I think if we forgot him they would kill him. I strongly believe we will be able to free him. The way to do it is to continue the campaign, to continue to embarrass the Soviets, to continue what we have been doing in public relations."

Uniting the left and the right

Mr. Lozansky reaches out to both right and left for support. "My new idea is to attract the peace movement in the United States to the Sakharov case because I sincerely believe that those two issues are inseparable," he says. "Peace activists think peace can be achieved by putting pressure on the U.S. government or the governments of major democratic countries, and they organize demonstrations and rallies and petitions to cut the defense budget or remove American missiles. It's one-sided and this is dangerous because the Soviets use these things and of course manipulate them for their own purposes."

"The only way we can have stable peace and guaranteed peace is if the people of the Soviet Union will be able to do similar things in their country. We have to support those who speak out for the same ideas that we speak here, for freedom of expression, for limiting the defense budget in the Soviet Union, for improvement of understanding between these two countries."

He has little faith in arms control agreements, though he understands they serve a political purpose. If they sign an agreement with the Americans, Mr. Lozansky says, "the Soviets will violate it anytime they want, whenever it's convenient for them, because they are not reporting to the people, and the parliament is a rubber stamp organization. A ruling elite clique actually makes the decisions. If they decide for some reason that the agreement they signed with the United States is not any more valuable to them, they just will dismiss it, that's it, and they are not accountable to anyone."

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Democratizing the Soviet Union

Mr. Lozansky does not consider himself primarily a political activist, he says, though circumstances have forced him into that role. He prefers to think of himself as a scientist and educator, roles that he will have ample opportunity to fulfill through the ASI. The fact is, however, that his long-range goal challenges the whole political structure of the Soviet Union. His highest ambition is to democratize his native land. It is no small task, but one toward which he gradually is gathering momentum.

One of his ideas was to print books written by people like Mr. Sakharov, whose works are banned in the Soviet Union, and smuggle them back into the country. Some of the people on the institute's board had trouble with that idea. Though willing to lend their names to help Mr. Sakharov and promote academic excellence through the institute, they felt addressing the larger problem of democratizing the Soviet Union was going too far.

Mr. Lozansky still thinks it is a good idea. If he cannot do it through the ASI, in fact, he is thinking of forming another organization that will be more bold.

"People smuggle Bibles in," he says. "The books we would print would not call for violence or to overthrow the Soviet government. They would tell people how to fight for their rights. These books would teach people how to be a proud man, how to fight for basic rights, how to fight for rights guaranteed by their own constitution. The Soviet constitution is a very good constitution. It allows free speech, free forming of groups, free expression of demonstrations, it allows you everything. But when you want to use one of your rights, you go to jail. Basically what dissidents in the Soviet Union are saying is they want the government to respect its own constitution. This is not illegal."

Fighting the ideological war

He criticizes the U.S. government for focusing on hardware, or armaments, in its dealings with the Soviets and disregarding what he calls "software," the ideological confrontation with communist ideas. He supports a strong defense, but feels that the ideological war requires investment, too.

"I see every dollar invested into democratization of the Soviet Union is equal to a thousand dollars invested in hardware," he says. "Unfortunately you don't see yet that the U.S. government understands this, or this Congress."

He is worried about the quality of math instruction in American schools, which he says falls far behind that required in the Soviet Union. That is why, starting Feb. 26, he will be teaching an in-depth precalculus class which, along with a college physics class, will be offered for college credit to gifted high-school students. About 20 students are expected to attend the first classes, to be held at Mount Vernon College, located in Northwest Washington.

"I'm not worried about numbers. Most important is if the program will be good and that we get started," says Mr. Lozansky. The institute also plans to publish a national scientific magazine for high-school students, tentatively named Quark, after a sub-atomic particle discovered by Nobel Physics Prize-winner Sheldon Lee Glashow. Mr. Glashow is president of the institute and will be editor-in-chief of the magazine.

Eugene Zykov, information officer at the Soviet Embassy, who frequently conducts programs for American students, agrees with Mr. Lozansky's assessment of the educational gap between the two countries.

"I would say that as far as I could see here in your country . . . students know comparatively less than Soviet students in the fields of politics, geography, mathematics and science," says Mr. Zykov. "That is not just my opinion. It is recognized by educational experts in the United States and the Soviet Union."

Mr. Sakharov earlier learned of the institute and its planned projects through his son-in-law, Efrem Yankelevitch, who is a member of its board. Until last May Mrs. Bonner was allowed to travel between Gorki and Moscow and to keep in touch with their children in the United States. In May, however, she also was arrested and forced into exile. Since then communications from the couple have been few and brief.

But friends in the West have been very active. Last year the ASI organized 50 projects around the world. They included conferences in Paris and Geneva, a huge birthday party in Paris that drew 5,000 people, and the creation of a group of former Soviet musicians to tour the world. In addition, Mr. Lozansky has put together a collection of writings on Mr. Sakharov, soon to be published.

Mr. Lozansky is not discouraged in the difficult task of trying to exert influence on the two biggest world powers. To the Soviets, he will continue his persistent demands for basic freedoms for Soviet citizens, symbolized by the restoration of Andrei Sakharov's civil rights. To the Americans, he will continue to suggest that ideological war is economical and makes good sense. And to the people of both countries, he wants to spread the idea that peace and freedom are inextricably linked.

"The top priority for all of us is to survive in this age of nuclear weapons," he says. "To survive as free people and to preserve peace, I see the best way [is] through putting pressure toward democratization of the Soviet Union. "I sincerely believe that by helping Andrei Sakharov, by demanding that the Soviets respect him and allow him to be a free man, we can contribute to the cause of peace."